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Ambrosino, Tom

Sunday Incident

To: Ambrosino, Tom

Dear Resident:

Other than the substance abuse problems in the Square, you haven't really heard me talk a lot about public safety generally since I've been here.

I hope no one interprets that lack of discussion as a lack of interest. You can't be the leader of any urban municipality in this day and age without constant concern about, and constant attention to, public safety. I really want to make this City a better place before my tenure ends, and I certain can't do that unless I both make a dent in crime in this community and improve the perception of safety, regardless of actual crime results. Unfortunately, events like the one on Sunday make that job much more difficult.

What residents and outsiders do need to know, however, is that long before my start as City Manager, the City and its Council made a significant commitment to public safety, outlined in an effective Ten Point Public Safety Plan (attached) that for the most part remains in effect. As City Manager, the most effective thing I can do is commit to maintaining those resources -- and then stepping out of the way and letting our extremely professional and capable Police Dept., led by Chief Kyes, do its job.

It is worth reminding folks about some of the highlights of that Plan.

The City has committed to a contingent of 111 Police Officers. That's more than Everett, Revere, Malden or Medford. For a city of this size, this financial commitment reflects a significant emphasis on public safety.

This significant Police contingent has enabled the City to have a permanent Street Robbery Task Force.

It has ensured that the Police Dept. has the resources to deploy personnel to regional public safety efforts, including the recent one that decimated the leadership of the gang known as MS-13.

And, it has allowed the Police Dept. to provide dedicated officers to the state's Safe and Successful Youth Initiative, a partnership with ROCA designed to target at risk young adults between 17 and 24.

There are other efforts as well:

We have instituted a HUB & COR roundtable each Thursday morning at the Police Station, staffed with stakeholders from numerous organizations, whose goal is identify at risk youth and families and intercede with services **before** crime or violence or other harm occurs.

I've also committed, and have a Chief who is committed, to dedicated walking patrols. They were in effect much of the Summer and Fall, and they will start back up shortly in Bellingham Square, the Broadway Corridor and in and around the City Hall neighborhood as soon as Spring arrives.

We even fund a prostitution prevention effort, which this year has been dedicated to periodic stings but next year I hope will support some dedicated services for those caught up in the terrible life of sexual exploitation.

Now, all of these resources can never totally eliminate what we saw early Sunday morning -- another incident of senseless gun violence ending in tragedy.

But, now I'll get on my soapbox, and articulate a position with which some of you will not agree.

Until this Country and its national leaders are going to take seriously the appalling number of guns on the streets of America, guns that often end up in the hands of young men under 20 whose brains haven't even developed enough to control their worst emotional impulses, guns whose toll is felt most acutely in minority communities like Chelsea, we could add a hundred more police to our streets, and we still couldn't end this violence.

All we can do, and what I am committed to do, is continue with the efforts that I mentioned above in the hope that we will, over time, slowly reduce crime in our community, ensure that incidents like Sundays are isolated, and eventually bring our residents the feeling of safety and comfort that they deserve.

Now, saying the City is prepared to do all it can to remediate the problems is not enough. We will not be successful if City government is working in isolation. Parents and guardians have to be willing to reach out for support if they feel their children are at risk. Tenants have to be willing to speak out to our Inspectional Services Dept. about problem landlords. Residents must be willing to be engaged and alert the police to something that seems out of the ordinary on their street or in their neighborhood.

City officials don't have all the answers. I stand willing to listen, and I know the Council is willing to listen, if you have some suggestions on how we can do an even better job keeping our City safe.

Let me conclude with one final point.

It's hard to look at the "big picture" when incidents like the one on Sunday occur. Trying to convince someone whose friend or loved one was just a victim of gun violence that we are making progress on crime is not merely an exercise in futility, it's almost disrespectful.

But, in a calmer moment, you should take a look at crime over time in this City. It is trending in the right direction. And, the City Council's financial commitment has made a difference.

There are many, many positive stories to tell about the City of Chelsea. It truly is a City on the rise with extraordinary potential. It is certainly going to take some time and work to bring about the healing required by what occurred this weekend. But, let's not allow this incident to undermine all the progress that Chelsea has made in the past few years.

Tom A.

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